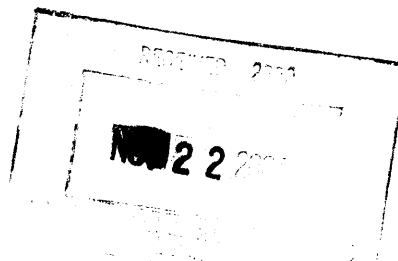


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Fraterville Miners' Circle

other names/site number Leach Cemetery

2. Location

street & number Leach Cemetery Lane

N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town Lake City

N/A ☐ vicinity

state Tennessee

code TN

county Anderson

code 001

zip code 37769

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Herbert L. Harger
Signature of certifying official/Title

11/19/04
Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☒ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other,

(explain:)

Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

1-5-05
Date of Action

Fraterville Miners' Circle
Name of Property

Anderson County, Tennessee
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☒ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

1

buildings
sites
structures
objects
Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Funerary/Cemetery

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Funerary/Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/A

walls N/A

roof N/A

other Marble

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** moved from its original location.
- ☒ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☒ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

Other: labor history

Commemorative landscape

Period of Significance

1902-1954

Significant Dates

1902

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Fraterville Miners' Circle
Name of Property

Anderson County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre Lake City 137 NW

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 757101 4010934
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____
☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tony N. VanWinkle/Historic Preservation Planner
organization East Tennessee Development District Date September 2004
street & number 5616 Kingston Pike Telephone 865/584-8553
city or town Knoxville state TN zip code 37939-2806

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Trustees of Leach Cemetery; Ruby Slover, President
street & number 434 Old Lake City Highway telephone 865/426-6681
city or town Lake City state TN zip code 37769

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

DESCRIPTION

The Fraterville Miners' Circle is located just south of the town of Lake City (known formerly as Coal Creek) off of New Clear Branch Road in north-central Anderson County. While Lake City's population as of the 2000 census stood at 1,888 persons, during its reign as Coal Creek that population once exceeded 3,000, making it the largest town in the county by the end of the nineteenth century. Situated on a prominent hill overlooking the town of Lake City and the Coal Creek Valley, and with views of Walden Ridge and Vowell Mountain to the west, the Fraterville Miners' Circle is a discreet site within the larger Leach Cemetery, the latter established in 1845. Miners were transported to Leach Cemetery for burial after the fatal May 19, 1902 explosion at the Fraterville Mine, located near the present town of Briceville. The Miners' Circle is a distinctive, self-contained site within the larger cemetery. The most conspicuous unifying features of the site are the circular burial pattern/grave marker arrangement, the inscribed date of 1902 featured on every marker therein, and the central commemorative obelisk.

The eighty-nine gravesites within the cemetery are arranged in two concentric circles. Marker types vary greatly and include flat markers; simple, domed or arched tablets; obelisks, pedestal monuments and one scroll monument. All of the monuments are of local Tennessee marble, likely processed and dressed in Knoxville. At the center of the circle is a large commemorative obelisk erected by the United Mine Workers of America shortly after the internment of the miners. Three of the flat surfaces of the central obelisk feature the names of all 184 miners who died in the Fraterville mine explosion of May 19, 1902. Other miners are buried in local family and church cemeteries, including the cemetery at Briceville Community Church, listed in the National Register in 2002. This includes eleven names somewhat set apart under the label, "Colored Men." The face of the monument features a crossed pick and shovel, the material symbol of occupational identity and solidarity, and an epitaph that reads: "Erected to the memory of the 184 men and boys who lost their lives in the Fraterville Mine Explosion, May 19, 1902."

The individual grave-markers and mortuary symbolism are typical of early 20th century grave markers in form, though several feature initials identifying them with the UMWA, or United Mine Workers of America. In their arrangement the graves herein represent a distinctive kind of symbolism adopted and executed to commemorate and memorialize a collective tragedy within this singular occupational culture.

Precedents for miner's circle in cemeteries are unknown, and thus the origins of this particular configuration may be a highly localized expression. A second miners' circle also exists a short distance away near the town of Briceville commemorating the Cross Mountain Disaster of 1911, the county's second worst mining accident. Though it is unknown with any certainty, the circle formation is said by some to represent equity—that all men died together as equals and no one of them is greater than the others¹. Other accounts suggest the circle arrangement was employed simply for the purpose of saving space in the cemetery. The former

¹ From phone interview with Wally Presley of Lake City, Spring 2004.

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Section number 7 Page 2

Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

account of the symbolism of the miner's circle seems more likely considering what is known about occupational solidarity among historic coal mining populations and the fact that Leach Cemetery has open plots for burial even today.

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Fraterville Miners' Circle is being nominated to the National Register under Criterion A for its significance in local and regional labor and social history and under Criterion C for its representation of a commemorative cemetery landscape. As the only collective representation of the worst mining disaster in Tennessee's history, as a distinctive local attempt to commemorate that disaster, and as one of only a few material remnants of the area's once booming coal mining industry, the Circle site is among the region and the state's most important and heretofore unrecognized property types. While the general area surrounding the Circle site served as location for several of the most significant and tragic events in the labor history of Tennessee, amid one of the state's most important historic coal-mining regions, little material evidence of that history remains. As a distinctive and poignant commemorative form, the Fraterville Miners' Circle is noteworthy and deserving of recognition.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The Coal Mining Industry in Anderson County

Settled around 1790, Anderson County was officially created from parts of Knox County in 1801. The nexus of earliest settlement radiated primarily along the course of the fertile Clinch River Valley in the central and southern sections of the county. In contrast, before the immediate post-Civil War years, that rugged section of Anderson County west and northwest of Walden's Ridge was only sparsely populated. This was of course due to the nature of the land—rocky and steep, with infertile, shallow soil, it provided little attraction to what was an overwhelmingly agricultural society in the antebellum years. After the Civil War, however, northern land prospectors, many of them former Union soldiers, either returned south themselves or sent their capital to finance new industrial enterprises predicated on the vast untapped resources of the southern highlands. Timber and coal were chief among these.

One such industrialist/pro prospector was Joseph Richards, a Welsh-born immigrant who came south to Knoxville from Pennsylvania in 1866. Richards, highly experienced in the iron and associated coal industries of both his Old World homeland and Pennsylvania, was among the founding principals of the Knoxville Iron Company, that city's leading industry from 1870 through the Depression.² Central to the production of iron in this era was the heat-energy derived from coal. The Knoxville Iron Company's rolling mill and foundry were fortuitously located within a reasonable distance of the coal reserves in the Cumberland Mountains of Anderson County, and those of the Coal Creek watershed specifically. The Iron Company opened one of the earliest known commercial coalmines in the upper Coal Creek Valley. The upper reaches of the Coal Creek Valley lie just west and south of Lake City, between the coal bearing eastern escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau and the western slope of Walden Ridge. Accessible to Lake City through a small gap in Walden Ridge, the upper valley encompasses the headwater regions of Coal

² Rabun, J.S., National Register Nomination for "Knoxville Iron Foundry Complex—Nail Factory and Warehouse" (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1980).

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

Creek, Laurel Fork and Beech Grove Fork and includes the largest historic coal mining communities in the county—Briceville, Fraterville, The Wye, and Beech Grove.

The proximity of an essential raw natural resource to the center of industrial consumption that characterized the Coal Creek Valley was distinctive among coal mining districts in the greater Southern Appalachian region. As local historian James Overholt asserts, "Unlike many parts of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, where commercial centers were far away from many of the coal deposits, and rail construction was difficult, railroads could be run from Knoxville to Coal Creek with relative ease—making Coal Creek Valley one of the earliest coal districts in Appalachia."³ Thus, while small-scale mining of coal for personal use had occurred in Anderson County perhaps in the early nineteenth-century, it was not until the arrival of Knoxville's iron industry in the post-bellum era that large-scale commercial exploitation of coal reserves began.

The same features that made the link between Knoxville's iron industry and Anderson County's coal an advantageous situation for industrial developers quickly attracted the attention of others eager to cash in. Henry Wiley, an Anderson County leader who had fought for the Union during the war, returned home to complete the first thirty miles of railroad line between Knoxville and Coal Creek in 1869.⁴ He and partner Williams S. McEwen formed the Coal Creek Mining and Manufacturing Company shortly thereafter, leasing local mining lands in the Coal Creek Valley to smaller coal operators. Among the first mines to start operations after the expansion of the rail line in 1869 was the Fraterville Mine.

By the 1870s, numerous coal-mining companies were operating in the area. In this decade and continuing into the 1880s, as noted by James Overholt, "Companies such as Knoxville Iron Company, East Tennessee Coal Company, Coal Creek Coal Company, and Black Diamond Coal Company had, by then, moved in and started their operations, the first ones located near the village of Coal Creek, and others opening up as railroad construction permitted, extending outward toward Briceville on one side and Beech Grove on the other."⁵ All of these towns had become typical industrial boomtowns by the end of the 1880s. Supporting the rapid growth of the towns was the local production of two hundred thousand tons of coal per year by 1880. "Indeed," continues Overholt, "throughout that period, until about 1903, 'Anderson County led all other counties of the state in the production of coal.'"⁶

Although Anderson County was the state's leading producer of coal in this era, the financial rewards would remain illusory to most of the miners themselves. Growing malcontent among miners related to matters of fair wages and decent working conditions would precipitate the first strikes in the area in 1876. The mining companies answered by importing convict labor to perform the work for the cost of leasing the prisoners from the state. This practice was actively encouraged by the state as it kept the cost of prisons down since it simultaneously generated revenues. As writer Augusta Grove Bell noted of the convict lease system, "The

³ Overholt, James, *Anderson County, Tennessee: A Pictorial History* (Oak Ridge: Children's Museum of Oak Ridge, 1989), pp. 34.

⁴ Bell, Augusta Grove, *Circling Windrock Mountain* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), pp. 172-173.

⁵ Overholt, James, pp. 34.

⁶ *ibid*, pp. 37.

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

system was not only profitable, the idea of using convicts as virtual slave labor also fit easily into an economy that only a few years before was based on actual slavery. Just as important, convict labor offered the ultimate return on investment so crucial to the state's postwar recovery."⁷

The free miners were incensed by the convict lease system and launched into a series of increasingly violent retaliatory actions that finally escalated into the armed conflict known as the Coal Creek War of 1891-1892. After a large number of convict laborers were freed from stockades by armed free miners in 1891, Governor James Buchanan sent in the state militia to quell the rebellion. After considerable resistance by the military force of free miners, the militia finally succeeded in putting down the uprising. The convict lease system would continue for another four years, but the Coal Creek War led to the eventual abolition of the system and the construction of Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary and its associated state-operated coal mines there in 1898.

Not only were fair wages and working conditions deplorable in these early years of the mining industry, but safety regulations were non-existent as well. The captains of industry had shown how little they were concerned with decent working conditions or fair wages and did even less to insure the basic safety of the mines, especially if any such effort could potentially cut bottom line profits. It would take the great advances in the workers' rights movements initiated by national labor organizations to finally change this situation. Still, the first attempt at establishing governmental regulatory authority for the coal mining industry, in the form of the U.S. Bureau of Mines, was not instituted until 1910. Even then, their role was strictly advisory, with the agency finally gaining right of entry without the mine owner's consent in 1941. Thus, Fraterville and other mines in the Coal Creek Valley had operated for years without much concern for overall safety, daily hazards, or potentially tragic industrial accidents. Even the Fraterville Explosion would not result in immediate regulations or oversight of operating conditions. Such was the nature of the local coal mining industry on the eve of the greatest mining disaster in the South up to that time. But it was in this very same shared occupational experience that miner's found common identity and unity. As historian Crandall Shifflett suggests, "Common dangers and risks characterized this industrial occupation. Mine work engendered a sense of cohesiveness and group solidarity that set coal miners apart, even from many other industrial workers."⁸

The Fraterville Mine Explosion

By the spring of 1902 the Fraterville Mine had been in operation for nearly thirty years under the ownership of the Coal Creek Coal Company. On the morning of May 19 of that year, the mine violently exploded, eventually killing every man and boy working that day, 184 miners in all. No one was left to explain what had actually caused the accident, but it was most likely the ignition of a pocket of methane gas, a common danger in coal mines, that in turn set off an explosion of volatile coal dust.⁹ The explosion itself likely killed

⁷ Bell, Augusta Grove, pp. 179

⁸ Shifflett, Crandall A., *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in the Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 101.

⁹ Bell Augusta Grove, pp. 193

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

several people instantaneously, but most of them probably died slow deaths by suffocation due to the build-up of poisonous gases following the explosion.

Awaiting death, several miners composed farewell letters to family members. Among those letters still in existence is the one composed by Jake Vowell to his wife Ellen. In it he wrote, " 'We are shut up in the head of the entry with a little air and bad air closing in on us fast. . . If we never live to get out we are not hurt but only perished for air. There is but a few of us here and I don't know where the other men is.' " Vowell continued, " 'Ellen, I want you to live right and come to heaven. Raise the children the best you can. Oh how I wish to be with you. Goodbye all of you, goodbye. Bury me and Elbert in the same grave by little Eddy. Goodbye Ellen, goodbye Lily, goodbye Jimmie, goodbye Horace—Jake and Elbert.' " In a post script Jake Vowell added these final words, " 'Oh God for one more breath. Ellen, remember me as long as you live. Goodbye darling.' " ¹⁰

After word of the explosion spread, relatives and people from adjacent towns gathered at the entrance of the mine and waited as rescue workers attempted to pull any survivors from the wreckage. By the next morning, not one person had been brought out of the mine alive, a pattern that would continue for three days. The explosion devastated the population of Fraterville. As Bell asserts, "The forty-three households that made up Fraterville, between Briceville and the Wye, had been nearly stripped of its men and boys. Only three were left, according to the front-page story, leaving every house with 'a weeping wife and crying children.' " ¹¹

Relatives identified most of the dead bodies, but others, perhaps those of itinerant miners, remained unidentified. Some of the men and boys were buried in various family and church cemeteries, including the cemetery at Briceville Community Church, housing graves not only from the Fraterville accident, but the 1911 Cross Mountain explosion as well—the two worst mining accidents in the county's history. Unknown itinerant miners were buried in the equivalent of a Potter's Field or alongside the railroad tracks. Eighty-nine of the miner's bodies, however, were carried to a high hill in the Leach Cemetery overlooking the town of Coal Creek (now Lake City). Here they were buried in two concentric circles united by a central obelisk featuring a crossed pick and shovel and the names of all one hundred eighty four miners killed in the explosion—a powerful symbol of occupational solidarity. A few years after the mass burial (exact date unknown), the United Mine Workers of America erected the large obelisk in the center of the circle. Of course, all of the grave markers feature the same date of death—May 19, 1902.

The Fraterville Miner's Circle Cemetery is one of the few material traces of this region's rich late nineteenth/early twentieth century coalmining heritage. As a symbolic statement, the cemetery attests to the camaraderie and cohesiveness of this historic occupational culture, the shared circumstances that unified all miners in life as in death. It is also important as a unique commemorative landscape. While the origins of

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 191.

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

the circular pattern of markers are unknown, there are other cemeteries that have circular commemorative areas. However, in the coal mining region of East Tennessee this is an unusual cemetery pattern. The Fraterville Miners' Circle is still recognized as a commemorative site today.

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The circumference of the circle cemetery itself forms the boundary within the 8.8acre parcel #106. It is less than one acre. From the center commemorative monument, the radius of the circle is about 32 feet.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary includes the circle formation only and none of the extraneous and more recent gravesites of the larger Leach Cemetery.

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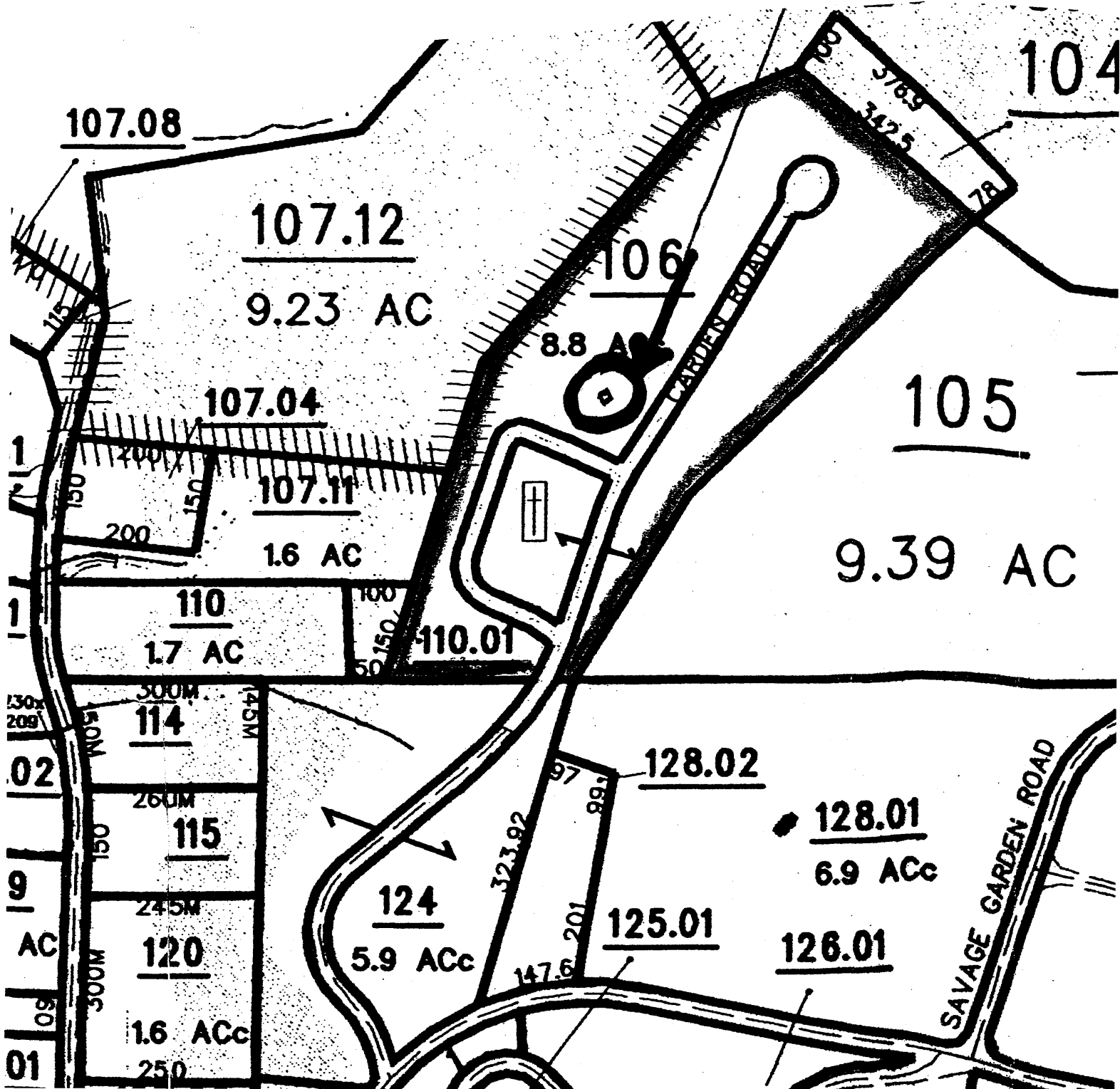
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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

Tax map

Scale 1" = 200'



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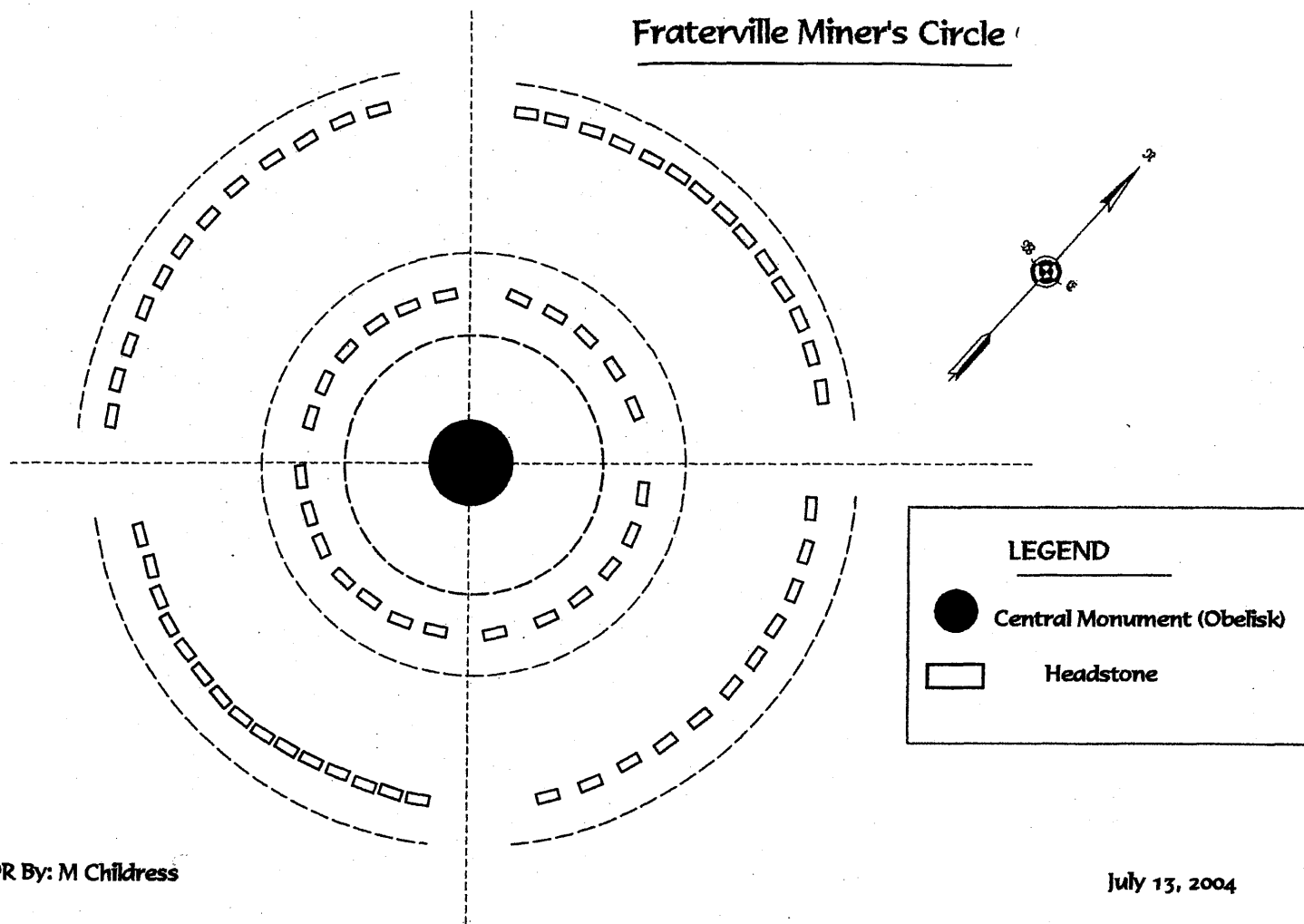
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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

Site plan

Fraterville Miner's Circle



DR By: M Childress

July 13, 2004

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Fraterville Miners' Circle
Anderson County, Tennessee

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo by: Tony VanWinkle
Date: 6/2/04
Neg: Tennessee Historical Commission

#1 of 19
Overview from E side

#2 of 19

Overview from S side

#3 of 19

Overview from SE

#4 of 19
Detail, Tommy Davis/Ernest Wilson headstones

#5 of 19
Detail, circle configuration

#6of 19
Detail, name inscriptions on central obelisk

#7 of 19
Detail, name inscriptions on central obelisk

#8 of 19
Detail, name inscriptions on central obelisk

#9 of 19
Detail, epitaph, pick and shovel, and name inscriptions on central obelisk

#10 of 19
Detail, crossed pick and shovel and epitaph on central obelisk

#11 of 19
Detail, circle configuration

#12 of 19
Detail, Brooks scroll and pedestal monuments

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Detail, epitaph, J.C. Macklin headstone

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Detail, ornamentation, John B. Slover Headstone

#15 of 19

Detail, circle configuration

#16 of 19

Detail, circle configuration & U.M.W. of A. inscription, George W. Hill headstone

#17 of 19

Detail, individual markers/circle configuration

#18 of 19

Detail, individual markers/circle configuration

#19 of 19

Detail, simple and arched tablets, circle configuration